



## Back to School: A Fresh Start to Dream Big

### Tips for Parents

As much as students enjoy their summer vacation, most will say they are eager to get back to school in the fall. They miss their friends, they miss their school activities — and yes, they even miss their classes.

Teenagers, in fact, like to learn and explore. This is a time in their lives when they are discovering their skills, what they like and what they don't like. They also like to be nurtured and guided through this exploration process — even though they will often act as if they don't like or trust their parents or want their parents involved.

Teenagers also appreciate being held to high standards. It is natural for them to try to get away with taking only easy classes, not completing assignments or turning their homework in late. They are testing us to see if the adults in their lives really care enough to keep them on the right path. So although they may grumble or complain about strict deadlines or not getting a break, they have more respect for the adults who insist they work hard.

Teens also are testing us to find out what we really believe. If we allow them to take only easy classes, it must be because we don't think they are smart enough to do harder work. When they sense adults don't believe in them, many teens get discouraged and stop believing in themselves. Hope fades, and dreams die.

Back-to-school is a perfect time to get a fresh start on establishing high expectations with the teens in your life. School classes are new, and the slate has been wiped clean. Friendships are being rekindled, and school activities go quickly into high gear.

#### Tips:

- Set the tone. Your attitude is a model for the whole household. Tell your teen that you expect big things from him or her.
- Make your expectations clear. Kids don't like surprises. Set specific expectations regarding school attendance, what courses will be taken, when studying will be done, and the time for "lights out" at night.

**80% of recent high school graduates say they wish they had worked harder in high school.**





- If your teen rebels against structure, such as designated study time, don't force them to conform to your style. Back off and give them more control and responsibility. You still set the expectation (certain grades, for instance, or attendance requirements), but let the student set the process as long as they can produce the result.
- Expect your teen to take challenging courses, even if that means they may earn a lower (though not failing) grade. Challenging courses will stretch their thinking skills and their study habits.
- Don't focus solely on grade point average (GPA). Kids who take challenging courses may see a temporary dip in grades. Support him or her through this time so they will know you believe in them.
- Don't let history cloud your outlook. Forget what happened last year. This is a fresh start with a clean slate. If your student has lingering problems from last year with a school class, teacher or friend, discuss the situation with the school counselor or principal. Take your student with you so he or she can learn how to solve problems and overcome challenges.
- Expect rebellion. Remember, the kids are testing you to see if you believe in them and if you are serious. Be ready to stand firm even when they push back, and have appropriate consequences ready.